

BOOK REVIEW

Donald M. Vickery and James F. Fries: *Take Care of Yourself—A Consumer's Guide to Medical Care*. Reading, Mass., and Menlo Park, Calif., Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1976. xvi + 269 pp. \$5.95.

EDITORS and those to whom they send books to review are wary of paperbound books generally and particularly of the modern offsprings of the 19th century "doctor books." Most such books end in the waste basket. But not this one, please, not this one! Two obviously very well qualified and deeply thoughtful physicians have written a series of eminently sensible essays and very explicit flow sheets to guide layfolk through most of life's trivial, self-limited ills, to indicate which of them requires a physician's advice and to flag those which demand immediate attention.

The book begins by discussing health habits, The Annual Checkup and Other Myths, how to find a physician and a health facility, what drugs to keep on hand, and how to avoid medical frauds. Then follow essays and decision-oriented flow sheets dealing with emergencies, common injuries, poisons, and a variety of problems from sunburn to heartburn, ending with a sensitive and nonpornographic discussion of some ordinary sexual difficulties. Intelligent and responsible patients are often diffident about wasting their physician's time, but may be uncertain about what is wrong or how long to wait before they seek help. This book asks explicit questions, gives clearly defined Boolean "yes/no/need more information" choices, and outlines exactly what is to be done. Take, for example, chest pain. "Do any of these conditions exist? a) chest pain associated with shortness of breath; b) irregular pulse; c) sweat or dizziness; d) severe pain." If yes, "See physician now." If no, "Is chest tender to touch in area of pain?" If no, "Make appointment with physician." If yes, "Apply home treatment." And the home treatment outlined is detailed, explicit, and conservative. Dozens of such programs are outlined, and all seem to be what most physicians would advise under the circumstances.

Intelligent use of this manual—which is decidedly not a do-it-yourself-home-herniorrhaphy guide—will save enormous time and money, avoid overtreatment, and enable physicians to spend more time with the sick than with the well. The book is sensible, balanced, and clear, and physicians could do worse than have a supply to hand out to their regular patients. Warmly recommended.

WILLIAM D. SHARPE, M.D.